UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The socio-economic crisis which African countries have been experiencing since the early 1980s has inspired leaders from all walks of life to search for solutions, among other things, through studies and reports on various critical issues of public management and administration. From time immemorial, the public service has been regarded as the custodian, trustee, co-ordinator, controller and pacesetter for the management of resources and national economic development in almost all African countries. Therefore, it should be obvious that the widespread concern for the moral integrity and professional rectitude of public servants has been engendered both by the deteriorating social and economic conditions of the population and the legendary role of the public service as the pivot and the linchpin of the socio-economic advancement of African countries after independence from colonial rule. The growing disenchantment with the performance of African economies and the concomitant decline in the respect for public servants are not a source of comfort to all those who have genuine interest in the sustainable development and transformation of African societies.

A. Rationale of the report

must also be reconsidered against the realities of the worsening economic conditions of public and non-public officials.

4. The renaissance of public concern for ethics in government service and the renewed commitment of public service personnel to the normative dimensions of the ethics of public duties would restore confidence in government institutions and speed up the sustainable development of African countries. This report should therefore stimulate rewarding debates and studies on the issue of public service ethics and economic development in all African countries.

B. Definition of concepts

5. It is essential to define the main terms and expressions in the theme of this report in order to encourage a common understanding and appreciation of the issues in their proper context. The sheer heterogeneity of African countries in terms of population size and diversity; cultural ethos; ecology; occupational patterns; and the legacy of the colonial past, compels the articulation of concepts which may erroneously be assumed to be obvious. An attempt has, therefore, been made in the ensuing paragraphs to briefly explain the usage of terminology such as public service; ethics; responsibility; and accountability. The latter two terms have not been explicitly stated in the theme of the report but are of essence in the analysis and appreciation of the trends and implications of ethics and development.

(a) Public service

6. Public service should be viewed from the perspective of location of employees. They are rendered as public servants if they are engaged in the service of the state or local government or any statutory body established by the state. Public service is sometimes synonymous with government service. It is the range of public activities involving the management and delivery of goods and services by the state to society. Universally, all

It is not unusual for the public to hold some public servants responsible for duties over which they do not have authority as defined in the preceding paragraph.

14. Accountability refers to the obligation required of a subordinate to be answerable to the superior for the results achieved in the performance of assigned duties and responsibilities. In effect, it could be argued that since the public service derives its authority from the general public and its responsibilities and duties from the public interest, it must be answerable or accountable to the general public through the elected representatives of the population. In the African context, this [illegible] accountability - accountability relationships are blurred by [illegible] including the circumstances under which some countries [illegible] armed struggle versus peaceful means) and an [illegible] of regimes. In essence, high standards of ethics can be [illegible] personal moral standards and integrity, on the [illegible] accountability, responsibility and authority [illegible] opportunities of [illegible] economic [illegible] seem to be [illegible] currently muddled [illegible] public interest 5/

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] Symposium on [illegible]

political leaders and senior colleagues whose conduct is not in harmony with the public interest.

III. PERSPECTIVES OF ETHICS BEFORE AND AFTER THE ATTAINMENT OF INDEPENDENCE FROM COLONIAL RULE

16. The motivational ethos of people in all societies are shaped, among other things, by environmental factors including the dynamics of social interaction within each society and its exposure to external influences. In the same vein it could be argued that the ethical attitude and behaviour 7/ of public [illegible] could be summarized as in fig. 1.

7/ John P. Sherrerbourne, Jr., Management for Productivity, op.cit.

20. An evolutionary perspective on ethics stresses the fact that ethics are rooted in the changing traits of society. The concepts of state, government, economic organization, ownership and production relations have been in a state of flux in Africa. Besides the heterogeneity of the normative ethos of African countries and the commonly shared characteristics of the underdevelopment of productive forces, events preceding and accompanying the colonization and subsequent decolonization of African countries have had uneven impact on public service ethics. It is, therefore, only but logical that the trend of ethics should be explored during the period prior to independence; soon after independence, and from the onset of the current socio-economic crisis which does not show any signs of abating.

(a) Public service ethics prior to independence

21. It is common knowledge that African countries attained their independence from colonial rule on different dates and years. While Ghana attained its independence in 1957, Namibia joined the family of independent African nations in March 1990. Countries like Liberia and Ethiopia are reputed not to have experienced the hegemony of colonial rule. Some countries attained their nationhood through the balancing of the barrel of the gun and diplomatic negotiations while other countries did not shed blood on a large scale to achieve independence.

[illegible] attempt to explore the scenario of public service ethics in Africa was made, [illegible] as a background to the articulation of the public service [illegible] African countries at a time when, except for Egypt, Ethiopia, [illegible] Liberia and the Sudan, the other countries had experienced less than 20 years [illegible] much more focused attempt to analyse issues that are [illegible] as ethics are made in Africa: Promoting a Model [illegible] Conduct 11/ in Africa with particular reference to the [illegible] Even though the definition of administrative responsibility in [illegible] differs from the connotation in this report, there is considerable [illegible] the promotion of the value systems applicable to public employees as [illegible] ethical attributes of higher moral standards from public employees [illegible] the business community.

[illegible] of public service ethics prior to the independence of most African [illegible] and are motivated broadly into the period from the fifteenth century, [illegible] Europeans first arrived in Africa, up to 1884 when European colonialists [illegible] African [illegible] Conference and [illegible] to 1960 during [illegible] colonialists exploited Africa and sowed the seeds of underdevelopment.

[illegible] from the fifteenth century [illegible] the normative ethos [illegible] on ethnicity and the limited number of [illegible] in part, to the

10/ African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), African Public Service: Challenges and a Profile for the Future (Addis Ababa, AAPAM, 1984), pp.2-6.

11/ Ibid., pp.205-216.

constitution therefore made provision for an Ombudsman system to ensure the impeccable conduct of public service personnel.

C. Public service ethics since the onset of the ongoing economic crisis in the early 1980s

34. The enforcement of the codes of conduct in most African countries has been affected by various factors including the political instability that has bedeviled the continent during the last three decades and the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the population since the early 1980s. Public service ethics have, therefore, been under extreme stress not only because of the cumulative effects of the pre- and immediate post-independence periods but also because of the diminishing opportunities for employment, savings against the rainy day, the education of children and medical care; the low ebb of confidence in governmental institutions; and doubts in the efficacy of the public service in overcoming the challenges of the current economic crisis.

public and other callous behaviour which could be attributed to the economic squeeze brought about by the economic malaise of the 1980s.

37. It is becoming more and more evident that codes of conduct which were formulated to bring about some uniform understanding of the ethics expected of public servants have all but been relegated to the statute books. Criminal activities such as embezzlement of funds or theft of public property are still enforceable under the peral code or criminal laws of each country. In some African countries, anti-corruption agencies are still active but personnel of these agencies are not exempt from the pernicious consequences of the economic crisis. Economic liberalization measures have, in some cases, made it easier for public service employees to share in the windfall profits of private business since most business people who survive the economic crisis are a position to share some of their profits with public service officials. In effect, both the general public and public sector officials seem to complain bitterly about the deteriorating trend of public service ethics but at the same time participate in making the situation more desperate in the face of ever-escalating economic crisis.

III. IMPLICATIONS OF PUBLIC SERVICE ETHICS TRENDS

pay uneconomic prices to peasants through marketing boards and with the connivance of Board [illegible] who claimed to be protecting the interests of local farmers whereas their [illegible] were [illegible] administrators. The post independence problems of public enterprises such as marketing boards were created before independence. The establishment of these boards contributed to the worsening of the standards of ethics in the public [illegible] of many African countries.

[illegible] government and field administration, Europeans sought to [illegible] traditional African administrative systems were all but [illegible] traditional leadership were [illegible] terms of surrender. Any attempt [illegible] was futile. The reaction of colonial [illegible] was brutal and repressive. For [illegible] had hoodwinked them to [illegible] which they were written. [illegible] colonial regime and did not [illegible] represent. [illegible] members of local [illegible] administration.

[illegible] more desperate when there was loss of tribal land to white [illegible] legislation enacted against all development activities of the [illegible] population. This further illustrates the extent to which colonial [illegible] ethics as perceived and practised by [illegible] African societies. The result was that African economies remained largely [illegible] and most Africans began to lose confidence in the public service [illegible] administration. In these circumstance, resistance movements sprouted [illegible] length and breath of Africa. This spontaneous emergence of freedom [illegible] could be seen as a reaction not only to the subjugation and inhuman treatment inherent in colonial occupation but also an expression of serious doubts in the moral basis of colonial administration. This disillusionment with the quality of [illegible] service ethics has continued to influence the overall trend of ethics [illegible] development in independent African countries.

[illegible] during the early phase of independence

[illegible] African country inherited colonial legacies which have continued to influence the pattern and trend of public service ethics. In some countries the [illegible] has deteriorated faster than in other countries. Nonetheless, as Machiavelli observed in "The Prince" "There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more uncertain of success, nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all who profit by the old order and only lukewarm defenders in those who would profit by the new order.[1]/

[illegible]

48. There was a great deal of expectations soon after independence. The few Africans who were ready at independence to step into the shoes of departing colonials, Africanization of certain public service levels, irrespective of the capacities of the existing colonial ethics and argued convincingly for drastic and immediate changes in the salary scales and service conditions existing at the time of independence. The political leaders who rightly asserted their role as the dominant force in the new nations not only championed the cause of localization of the public service but also had a say in virtually all aspects of national life including decisions on employment in the public service. In addition, [illegible] for the pre-independence [illegible] of every person in society, [illegible] politicians themselves could not be expected to [illegible]. They had to reconcile their own personal interests with those of their fellow countrymen, their followers, the general public, the [illegible] and the nation. It became obvious that all these dilemmas were [illegible]

49. For [illegible] and civil servants, [illegible] business interests from the [illegible] corruption of the [illegible] countries. In addition to the traditional [illegible] transformation and [illegible] indoctrination [illegible] but not [illegible] advantage of the apparently [illegible] themselves [illegible] pressure of the population [illegible] to sustain colonial lifestyles as well as the encouragement of foreign investors and financiers who served the [illegible] emerged from many years of [illegible] in the quality of service in many [illegible] scenario has been one of [illegible] procurement for [illegible] projects was [illegible] countries found a [illegible] as partnership with national [illegible] studies.

50. From very [illegible] professional integrity of the public service [illegible] for the socio-economic development of African countries [illegible] country after country gradually became [illegible] through government-sponsored [illegible] grossly inflated cost of investment [illegible] breach of public service ethics [illegible] protection of foreign governments [illegible] investors from the metropole [illegible] near bankruptcy. It is by [illegible] of the public service of aggressive [illegible] supports offered by [illegible]

industrialized countries have in their combined effect 20/ contributed to the economic, especially the debt crisis, in which most African countries found themselves in the early 1980s.

(d) Implications for the onset and progress of current socio-economic crisis

51. The current socio-economic crisis confronting most African countries could be attributed to a plethora of endogenous and exogenous factors which survived independence and became more complex on the emergence of new social and economic demands by the population after the independence euphoria. Prior to the onset of the current economic crisis in the early 1980s, African countries had embarked on several courses of action to arrest the deteriorating standards of ethics. Some of the remedial actions taken to bring back some sanity into public service ethics included:

(a) Code of ethics: how have they fared in stemming the downward trend in public service ethics?

(b) Ministry cannot dictate process or structure for public service ethics?

(c) Anti-corruption commissions and records of ombudsmen, mediateur and [illegible] Have they succeeded in reconciling [illegible] with the virtue [illegible] in the public interest?

20/ Richard Gerster, "How to ruin a country: the case of Togo" in IFDA Dossier, May/June 1983.

integral arm of the law-and-order enforcement instrument of any government. When this instrument becomes the government itself, it must of necessity be expected to shoulder the triple functions of governing: maintenance of law-and-order; planning and management of socio-economic development policies, strategies and programmes. The military would, of necessity, enlist the co-operation and collaboration of civilian public servants in the daunting responsibilities of nation-building and national economic development management. This new partnership between the armed forces and civilian officials could lead to the reassertion of the supremacy of ethics as the hallmark of an excellent public service. On the other hand, the new partnership could lead to a collapse of professional integrity and moral values not only in the public service but also in the whole society. If this latter implication prevails, then the society would come to regard coups d'Etat as a noose rather than a lifeline.

54. Anti-corruption commissions and the revival of ombudsman systems have also featured in the remedial actions which some African countries have adopted to address the predicaments of ethics in the ever changing socio-economic environment in Africa, in particular, and in the international economic outlook in general. The aim is to involve the public interest aspects of the civic responsibility of the citizenry and to reconcile it with the self-interest of the individual in both official and private life. In this regard Machiavelli cautions that "there's such a difference between the way we live and the way we ought to live that the man who neglects the real to accomplish the ideal soon learns his ruin not his salvation." [1/] The anti-corruption institutions depends on the personal integrity of those [illegible] and their ability to achieve the goal of a clean [illegible] ethical ministry of each society. In general, the apparent [illegible] capacity of governments to deliver the goods and [illegible] of these watchdog institutions established in the midst of [illegible]

[illegible] public service ethics in Africa has had cumulative [illegible] development with particular reference to the following:

[illegible] and increased cynicism on government policy [illegible] capability and commitment to implement and carry them through [illegible] personal interest has served to stifle initiative and the [illegible]

[illegible] of good ethics in contemporary development of unity has become [illegible] perception and outlook of the [illegible] has become less [illegible] to public demands and responsive attitude to public [illegible] concern of the public.

1/ Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, Robert M. Adams, ed. and trans. (New York, W.W. Norton, 1977) cited in J. Patrick Dobel, "Integrity in the Public Service", Public Administration Review, May/June 1990, Vol.50, No.3 (Washington D.C., American Society for Public Administration, 1990), p.36.

(c) Unemployment and poverty have become endemic in the midst of untapped resources in land for arable agriculture; neglect of the informal sector; ill-fated factories due to corrupt practices in project studies and technology procurement, and staffing practices that are both nepotic and give preference to expatriate staff whose qualifications and experience may be comparable with those of local personnel;

(d) Distortion of the determination of development priorities and the consequential sub-optimal allocation of borrowed and internally generated financial resources; this has had the effect of increasing the debt burden of almost all African countries;

(e) Debasement of basic services such as health-care including basic sanitation, water and affordable housing; education; and poverty-alleviating public works programmes; this debasement has had debilitating effects on the human conditions in practically all societies across Africa;

(f) Depression not only of public service but also productivity in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy; depressed productivity reduces per capita and national income;

B. Public service ethics and implications for Africa's Future Development Challenges

56. The future role of public service ethics assumes that, notwithstanding the need to establish a viable balance between the public and private sectors of the economy, the public service sector would still be expected to play a pivotal role in the creation of a harmonious environment and climate for individual initiatives and public participation in national development. Past and present experiences which have been articulated, and future development challenges could be used as a springboard for discussions on the contours of the future role of public service ethics. An appreciation of some of the constraints which impeded the past role of ethics in public service is also essential for the recommendation of policy measures and action.

57. On attainment of independence, very little effort was made to rationalize the inherited colonial norms of ethics to match the temporal realities of post independent development. This apparent complacency with the colonial legacy could be attributed partly to the claim by some of the pioneer civil servants that they had the monopoly of knowledge about development and as such only their answers to development problems were the right ones. In time, however, it was realized that the ordinary citizen who had not participated in colonial administration, nevertheless, had immense [illegible] to contribute also to the ethics of economic development after independence.

[illegible] training of officials was aimed at the [illegible] of Britain [illegible] to sustain the erstwhile culture of the colonial administrator [illegible] of government officials for the new challenges of development. [illegible] of the civil servants and the populace did not promote the essence [illegible] development paradigm of African development but rather laid [illegible] on the outmoded appreciation of [illegible] ethics in collusion with [illegible] public servants.

[illegible] of some of [illegible] in search for the apparent [illegible] of some African [illegible] of public administration [illegible] in the [illegible] have brought [illegible] public administration, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] policy [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the public service has undoubtedly contributed to the persistent

[illegible] John Marcus, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Third World, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

23/ William Safran, The French Polity (New York, Longman Inc., 1977), p.207.

24/ See for instance, the editorial recommending the Code of Ethics for the alumni of the Ife Institute of Administration and other public servants, cited in AAPAM, A Decade of Public Administration in Africa, op.cit., p.142.

(d) Popular participant and democratization of development

70. The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation has, among other things, articulated the requirements of democratization of political processes and enhancement of popular participation in activities that affect the lives of people in all societies. The operationalization of the Charter would strengthen the standard of ethics in the public service.

(e) Improving the motivational bases of public service

71. It is not enough to persuade public servants to improve their ethics record without giving them the wherewithal in terms of timely payment of their contractual salaries and assuring them of public succour in old age or on rainy days. The behaviour of the manager as the leader is also a crucial factor in organizational ethics. It is common knowledge that subordinates know much more about the personal integrity of their supervisors/leaders than these superiors would ever imagine.

(f) Dialogue between elected/appointed and career public officials

72. The nature of public service (requiring, for instance, the harmonization of heterogeneous demands of individuals) is such that conflict and conflict resolution among public officials should be regarded as key factors in ethical behaviour. Even though it has been indicated that individuals are ultimately responsible for their conscience and ethical integrity, the fact remains that organizations can be major agencies of social control especially if they adopt a consistently positive approach to ethical issues.

73. Dialogue between elected/appointed and career public officials would improve ethics in public service. Each African country could design and implement mechanisms for regular interaction to resolve intra-public service conflicts which may give rise to or may emanate from ethical issues.

(g) Training for improved ethics in the public service

74. It can be postulated that every adult knows the difference between right and wrong and does not therefore require any training in ethics. This report indicates, however, that inefficiency can be a source of unethical behaviour. Training in leadership qualities, organizational mission and objectives, organizational problems and prospects, and attitudinal factors in employment can contribute to the improvement of ethics. Training would not only revamp the commitment of employees but also help them to extricate themselves from the daily dilemmas of ethics in occupations in which there is enormous discretionary power and immense temptations exacerbated by the pressures of economic hardship.

(h) Empirical research on ethics and national development

75. The suggestions so far made in this report could be regarded as tentative and implemented as such depending on the seriousness of observable public opinion in each African country. For more enduring and firm action to eradicate the scourge, each country could sponsor its institutions of higher learning to undertake empirical

research on the ramifications of ethics in society and on productive strategies and measures to strengthen the societal ethics in the interest of national development. The inter-disciplinary and participatory approaches to empirical research on ethics should be considered appropriate. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), and the African Economic Association (AEA) are regional associations that could provide some support to the empirical research efforts of African Universities and other institutions of higher learning in the field of society ethics and socio-economic development and transformation in the 1990s and beyond.